

DRAFT (4/01)

EPA Assistance to Support Colville Tribe

Background

In September of 2000, representatives from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation (CCT) met with EPA OSWER to raise environmental issues of great concern to the Tribes regarding contamination of Lake Roosevelt and the Upper Columbia River Basin in northeast Washington. The CCT believe the contaminated resources may adversely impact reservation lands and communities, and fear for the lost use of a national resource – Lake Roosevelt. The CCT is seeking EPA assistance to examine interrelated environmental concerns in a comprehensive manner, and to develop a strategy to address the environmental issues through a coordinated “big-picture” approach.

Among the environmental and human health concerns raised by the Tribes are water quality and sediment contamination issues resulting from major industrial and mining sources to the Columbia River. Significant concentrations of metals including arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury and zinc have been found in sediment samples collected from Lake Roosevelt. Elevated concentrations of dioxins, furans and PCBs have also been documented in fish tissue samples collected from the area. Additional concerns include potential exposure to the contaminated sediments during lake draw down periods, such as the potential for health effects resulting from dermal contact with the sediments, or from inhalation of airborne sediment particles. Many of these issues are bi-national since major contaminant sources are known to originate in Canada.

The CCT initially requested a meeting with OSWER because of on-going work with our Region 10 Superfund program, which is currently assessing contamination sources into the Columbia River in cooperation and consultation with the Tribes. The CCT raised their concerns to Headquarters to give a national focus on the range and complexity of issues in this geographical area, and highlight the resource limitations within the Region to address a site of this magnitude. OSWER recognizes the validity and significance of the Tribes concerns, and believes an appropriate response by EPA necessarily involves coordination among affected EPA program offices.

In conjunction with the CCT, we have identified a critical short-term need to begin addressing the concerns, which is a desire to fund an IPA with the Tribes, or a tribal employee through an EPA grant, who can further Regional efforts by focusing on core (cross-program) issues, provide meaningful participation in resolving multi-media issues, and coordinate among the significant number of stakeholders (including Environment Canada, EPA, State of Washington, CCT, local governments, the Lake Roosevelt Water Quality Council, the Bureau of Reclamation, Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Association, and other agencies) over a large area. The attached budget sheet proposes a 2-year funding effort to support this need.

This proposal provides a unique opportunity for EPA to support a critical and complex tribal environmental need. Environmental issues of concern to the Colville Tribe are

international, multi-media, and visible due to the impact of the Columbia River Federal Power System and recent decisions under the Endangered Species Act. This complexity warrants a creative assistance effort by EPA to join together assistance and support from multiple offices in order to give the tribe the ability to participate in critical decisions in a meaningful fashion.

Multi-media issues of primary concern to the Tribes

- Transboundary pollution of the Columbia River, Pend Orielle, Kettle, and Okanogan Rivers
- Hydropower-related issues of these transboundary waters
Hydro development and licensing in Canada
- Fugitive dust emissions from the Lake Roosevelt shoreline during drawdown.
- Transboundary water quality issues resulting from historic discharges (US and Canada)
- TMDL actions on the Columbia and Okanogan Rivers
- Transboundary dissolved gas issues on the Columbia and Pend Orielle Rivers
- Active participation on local watershed group
Lake Roosevelt Water Quality Council. Formed in 1990 to address point source pollution coming out of Canada directly impacting Lake Roosevelt. The Council is now actively working on technical water quality and sediment issues as a local watershed group conducting cooperative studies.
- Promotion of related research and monitoring.